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HEADQUARTERS
ARMY GROUND FORCES
Army War College
Washington, D.C.

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March 29, 1943.

SUBJECT: Observer Report.

TO: Commanding Generals,
Second and Third Armies,
III, IV, VII, VIII, IX,
X, XI, XII, XIII and XV Corps,
II, III and IV Armored Corps,
Airborne Command,
Amphibious Training Center,
Antiaircraft Command,
Desert Training Center,
Mountain Training Center,
Replacement and School Command,
Tank Destroyer Center,
Chief of the Armored Force.

1. The inclosed preliminary briefed report of Major Allerton Cushman, FA, observer from the Tank Destroyer Center and Headquarters Army Ground Forces to Northwest Africa for the period December 19, 1942, to March 1, 1943, is furnished herewith.

2. Distribution to divisions has been discontinued by the Commanding General, Army Ground Forces. Reproduction and distribution of observers' reports to subordinate units is not authorized.

3. The data and recommendations contained in this report represent the views of the individual observer and are furnished for information only.

4. Changes in training doctrine as enunciated in War Department publications, which are necessary because of the information contained in observers' reports, will be published by the War Department. Changes in training directives of this headquarters, which are necessary because of information in observers' reports, will be promulgated by this headquarters.

By command of LT. GEN. MCNAIR:

James D. Tanner
JAMES D. TANNER,
Lt. Col., A.G.D.,
Ass't Ground Adjutant General.

1 Incl - Report of Military Observer.
(Information cys to WDGS, ASF, AAF, C&GSS)

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SECTION I - TRAINING

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1. GENERAL. The German Army makes war better than we are now making it. Unless this is realized and unless steps are taken to improve the quality of our fighting forces, we are bound to suffer defeat when meeting it on anything like equal terms.

a. Morale. With notable exceptions, the prevailing attitude is that the North African operations is just another maneuver with live ammunition. The enemy is regarded as the visiting team and this not a major game. Even units suffering heavy casualties did not evince hatred of the enemy; there has been no recognizable effort by the high command to evoke a fighting spirit.

There was a general tendency to underrate the enemy in stories of his impending evacuation of North Africa, stories circulated by wishful thinking. In two months' experience at the front, I never heard a German "atrocities" story. Though they used such tricks as dressing in our uniform to shoot soldiers in American half tracks and set numerous booby traps, all this was accepted as "smart ball", things that we will soon be doing ourselves.

When the 70th Tank Battalion re-occupied an area in which one of its tanks had been lost several weeks before, it found a mound of fresh earth, surmounted by a cross bearing the inscription "Here lie the bodies of three brave American Panzer soldiers". Being essentially decent and very naive, our soldiers fall for this. No one tells them differently.

The German has purposely played clean, and we have not yet been mad. To the average soldier, Tunisia is just a strange place that he would like to the Hell out of, so why not "Mount up and ride away, and live to fight another day"?

Both officers and men are psychologically unprepared for war. All ranks are not yet imbued with the spirit that makes them willing to die rather than fail in any assigned mission. We cannot consider ourselves a first-class army until all echelons make a conscientious and determined effort to instill just such a spirit in every officer and man. This can best be done just after relief from front-line duty. Errors are then fresh in everyone's memory, but can be regarded objectively. Commanders can then transform their unit from raw troops into aggressive, seasoned soldiers. Most units I observed had not yet had a satisfactory rest period.

b. Training. I feel it impossible to train troops adequately for combat in eight months, especially such highly complicated branches as tank destroyers or armored units. In the confusion of combat, when instinct rather than reason governs, insufficient training is most noticeable. Failure to employ artillery materiel (machine guns and small arms) to make enemy tanks "bitten up", and failure to use smoke shell or other smoke sources are pertinent examples.

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If not lengthened, training must be intensified, stressing battle methods and field operations. General Lear's remark, "The more you sweat, the less will be your tears", carries more weight than fifty field manuals.

It is recommended that both officers and NCO's with command experience in combat be returned to this country continuously to add their experience to the training of troops here. Our national aversion to propaganda, especially if not well planned, should be recognized, however. Any system for returning experienced personnel to America should include expert briefing regarding their duties in the psychological preparation for combat.

SECTION II - TANK DESTROYERS

2. GENERAL. In the period from December 19, 1942, to February 22, 1943, no tank destroyer battalion had been employed as such in North Africa. All had been split into companies, platoon and even sections, in conformity with the then standard procedure for all other arms. It is felt that this not only hampered supply, maintenance and administration, but also prevented effective teamwork and close knowledge of the working procedure of those units to which the tank destroyers were attached.

Units observed were the 701st, 805th, 894th and 601st Tank Destroyer Battalions; I accompanied the latter organization through the OUSSELTIA VALLEY, SBEITIA and KASSERINE engagements. None of these units were equipped with the M10 tank destroyer.

3. GERMAN TACTICS. To understand our procedures in this theater, it is necessary to outline those of the enemy. His most publicized antitank weapon is the 88mm, but the 50mm and a newly-developed 75mm towed gun were also in evidence. The enemy habitually maneuvered his armor within a protective cordon of antitank weapons. Our forces had invariably to anticipate antitank guns before closing with German tanks.

a. Offense. In those actions witnessed by this observer, the Germans placed their 88's into position quickly enough to give immediate support to their armor. The 88mm has been mounted in the PzKw VI, their 56-ton heavy tank.

b. Defense. Whenever sufficient time is available to organize a strong point, enemy antitank gun positions are progressively employed and organized in depth.

(1) Core of the defense in these strong points is the 88mm gun. Immediately adjacent to the gun positions are dug elaborate slit trenches, occupied until the time for manning that piece. In one instance, in the OUSSELTIA VALLEY, about 100 infantrymen protected 88mm positions. Flanking these positions were 20mm machine guns, and the whole area was

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supported by tanks, which, judging by their tracks, had the mission of protecting flanks and rear.

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(2) The enemy has introduced a new towed 75mm gun with a 3,250 f/sec muzzle velocity, using tungsten carbide Pak 40 ammunition.

4. AMERICAN TACTICS. I failed to observe any defects in our tactics as outlined in available training literature. The difficulty lay in failure to follow these precepts.

a. Offense. Armored Force Artillery operated in the conventional FA manner; most firing was carried out at ranges of 6,000 - 7,000 yards, with fire direct center methods. Tank destroyers assigned the role of direct support artillery moved 500 to 1,000 yards behind the tanks, firing HE at the emplaced AT guns. This I consider a misuse of destroyers since it eliminates the possibility of using them as a mobile reserve to meet armored counterattack, and because the M1897 75mm gun has too flat a trajectory for gaining maximum effect against targets of this type.

(1) There is definite need for a high angle fire weapons to neutralize the German AT gun by direct fire methods. The ideal weapon for this task is the self-propelled 105mm howitzer and M7 carriage, now standard equipment for armored artillery. Its armor affords good protection from small-arms fire and shell fragments; its cross-country mobility is equal, if not superior, to that of the new M10 destroyer. For armored artillery, operating 5,000 or more yards from the front lines, it would seem that mounting the 105mm on the M3 half track would appear entirely adequate. This would have additional advantages over the M7 of (a) higher road speeds, (b) lower fuel consumption, and (c) less need for maintenance.

(2) It is recommended that one platoon of the tank destroyer company be equipped with four 105mm howitzers on the M7 carriage, having the primary mission of engaging enemy AT guns by direct fire. This heavy platoon would maneuver 500 to 1,000 yards behind the other two light platoons (each equipped with four 3-inch guns on M10 carriage) and thus give them direct and immediate support as soon as they drew fire from enemy AT defenses. This would eliminate any need for the security vehicles now included in this platoon, and for the two AA vehicles as well. The M7 is equipped with a .50-cal. MG capable of firing against either air or ground targets.

(3) Study of the organization of the German 501st Panzer Abteilung shows the need for a high-angle, direct-fire weapon to engage enemy AT guns. This enemy battalion included the new heavy tank, really a super tank destroyer, (its 88mm gun certainly has not the primary mission of attacking our infantry, artillery or rear area installations). According to G-2 sources in North Africa, each of the two companies of this battalion is organized as follows:

1 Hq. Platoon - - - - - (1 PzKwVI)

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4 Tank Platoons, each -----

(2 PzKwIII)
(2 PzKwIII)

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The PzKwIII are armed with short-barrel 75mm cannon instead of the normal 50mm gun. This cannon has a muzzle velocity of only 1,6000 f/sec and cannot, therefore, be considered a weapon for engaging our medium tanks. Mk III tanks appear to have the mission of protecting the Mark VI from being attacked by our AT weapons employing HE.

b. Defense. Our forces have not the necessary weapons required for setting up a static AT defense, one based in depth upon a series of strong points. The gun for this role must be a towed gun capable of being dug in and completely concealed until actually needed. It must be powerful enough to stop any tank with one shot at 1,000 yards, and be manned by a highly trained crew which will stick at its post even if surrounded by enemy tanks.

(1) It has been suggested that organic infantry AT guns might do this work, especially if the impotent 37mm were replaced by the 57mm. I believe, however, that the AT gun should be larger than 57mm, thus rendering it difficult for the infantry to employ. Furthermore, better results could be obtained by a unit specially selected and trained as anti-tank soldiers.

(2) After witnessing the large scale German attack, which decisively defeated our forces in Southern Tunis, I believe that the 3-inch towed gun will be suitable for North African operations. This will be true, however, only if it is employed in addition to, and not as a substitute for, our present tank destroyer battalions. The Germans attacking at SBEITIA were opposed by a force of destroyers aggregating less than a full-strength company. I am confident the advance would have been slowed down if we had had a defense in depth containing well-organized strong points, particularly if these had been located in such narrow defiles as FAID and KASSERINE.

(3) Tank Destroyer Organization and Equipment.

(a) Indirect Firing. It has frequently been necessary in North Africa to use tank destroyers as support artillery, with indirect fire methods. Recognizing this error, higher headquarters have taken steps to correct it.

It seems certain, however, that contingencies will again arise where tank destroyers must employ massed fires, such as exist when deep mud prohibits cross-country maneuver at opposed river crossings or in strongly-defended passes. Consequently, it is recommended that each tank destroyer platoon be equipped with an aiming circle or other instrument capable of laying all four destroyers for direction. It is understood that destroyers will, henceforth, be furnished panoramic sights and gunners quadrants as standard equipment.

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All tank destroyer personnel should be taught elementary artillery technique, including use of forward observation methods. Any situation experienced in the Tunisian fight thus far is covered by the procedure set forth in Armored Force FM 17-12.

(b) Observation Posts. The need for long-range observation to provide adequate warning of enemy mechanized movements was everywhere evident. Inadequate equipment severely curtailed the effectiveness of those OP's which were established. Following equipment is recommended:

BC scope,
Aiming circle,
Plane table with carrying case,
2 pair field glasses, M3,
2 EE telephones.

As a minimum, one set of such equipment should be provided for the company. No additional personnel is needed, but the 1st sergeant, reconnaissance sergeant and reconnaissance corporals should be trained in observation post technique.

(c) Radio. Radio communication has been most unreliable. The SCR-508 has been particularly untrustworthy at all except the shortest ranges. To provide adequate communication to gun companies and the reconnaissance company, it is recommended that the SCR-193, or its equivalent, the SCR-606, be employed. In the battalion command net, the effectiveness of the reconnaissance company has often been entirely neutralized, unless the SCR-193 was provided for each reconnaissance platoon.

(d) Reconnaissance Company. Captain Micheal Paulick, Commanding Reconnaissance Company, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, commented as follows:

1. "Armament was inadequate and too short in range, although consisting of six 37mm guns, mounted on half tracks M2 (instead of a caliber .50 MG called for in T/O 6842). This company encountered 75mm and 88mm guns out-ranging them at every turn. During one engagement with the German Mk IV tank, equipped with a long-barrel 75mm, one 37mm gun hit the enemy tank five times at a 1,000 yard range without causing any interruption in enemy fire. Reconnaissance by German Panzer units is usually made with Mk III and Mk IV tanks, and their outpost lines consist of strong points organized with 75mm guns on tanks and 88mm guns, either towed or mounted on the Mark VI tank. Our present fire power could not penetrate this screen."

2. " * * * It is recommended that the armored reconnaissance vehicles be equipped with a gun of not less than 57mm, and that there be a self-propelled assault gun in each platoon headquarters to aid the forward movement of reconnaissance elements, or to aid in the disengagement of these elements during a fight. Employment of the assault gun would be similar to that

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of reconnaissance units of an armored reconnaissance company."

3. "According to our present T/O, the platoon leader commands one section and the platoon sergeant the other. There is no provision for the leader to exercise centralized control over both sections from a platoon headquarters, which has proven a great weakness in organization."

Lieutenant R. K. von Nostrand, Reconnaissance Company, 13th Armored Regiment, stated that the 75mm howitzer on half track mounted has definitely proved its worth. The Germans have recently mounted a 75mm short-barrel cannon on their eight-wheeled armored car.

(e) Headquarters Company. Since the advance echelon (CP Group) of the headquarters company is often separated from the rear echelon by 50 miles or more, it is essential that this advance echelon be furnished with messing equipment. It does not appear necessary to have the present headquarters company reorganized into a smaller headquarters company and a separate service company.

END

(A full report will be rendered on the return of Major Cushman from North Africa in the near future, with index showing appendices and inclosures.)

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